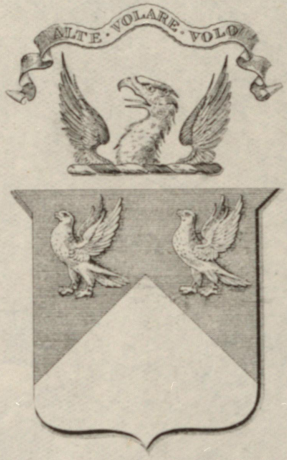
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NO. 20

THE EPIC OF THE WHEAT

GOLDEN GATE EDITION

THE OCTOPUS

COMPLETE
WORKS OF
FRANK
NORRIS

Published at New York *by*

Doubleday, Page & Co.

1903

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HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

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DEDICATED

TO

MY WIFE

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PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL.

MAGNUS DERRICK (the "Governor"), proprietor of the LOS MUERTOS RANCHO.

ANNIE DERRICK, wife of Magnus Derrick.

LYMAN DERRICK, } sons of Magnus Derrick.
HARRAN DERRICK, }

BRODERSON, } friends and neighbors of Magnus Derrick.
OSTERMAN, }

ANNIXTER, proprietor of the QUIEN SABE RANCHO.

HILMA TREE, a dairy girl on Annixter's ranch.

GENSLINGER, editor of the Bonneville "Mercury," the railroad organ.

S. BEHRMAN, representative of the Pacific and Southwestern Railroad.

PRESLEY, a *protégé* of Magnus Derrick.

VANAMEE, a sheep herder and range rider.

ANGÉLE VARIAN.

FATHER SARRIA, a Mission priest.

DYKE, a black-listed railroad engineer.

MRS. DYKE, Dyke's mother.

SIDNEY DYKE, Dyke's daughter.

CARAHER, a saloon keeper.

HOOVEN, a tenant of Derrick.

MRS. HOOVEN, his wife.

MINNA HOOVEN, his daughter.

CEDARQUIST, a manufacturer and shipbuilder.

MRS. CEDARQUIST, his wife.

GARNETT,
DABNEY,
KEAST,
CHATTERN, } ranchers of the San Joaquin Valley.

The Trilogy of The Epic of the Wheat will include the following novels:

THE OCTOPUS, *a Story of California.*
THE PIT, *a Story of Chicago.*
THE WOLF, *a Story of Europe.*

These novels, while forming a series, will be in no way connected with each other save only in their relation to (1) the production, (2) the distribution, (3) the consumption of American wheat. When complete, they will form the story of a crop of wheat from the time of its sowing as seed in California to the time of its consumption as bread in a village of Western Europe.

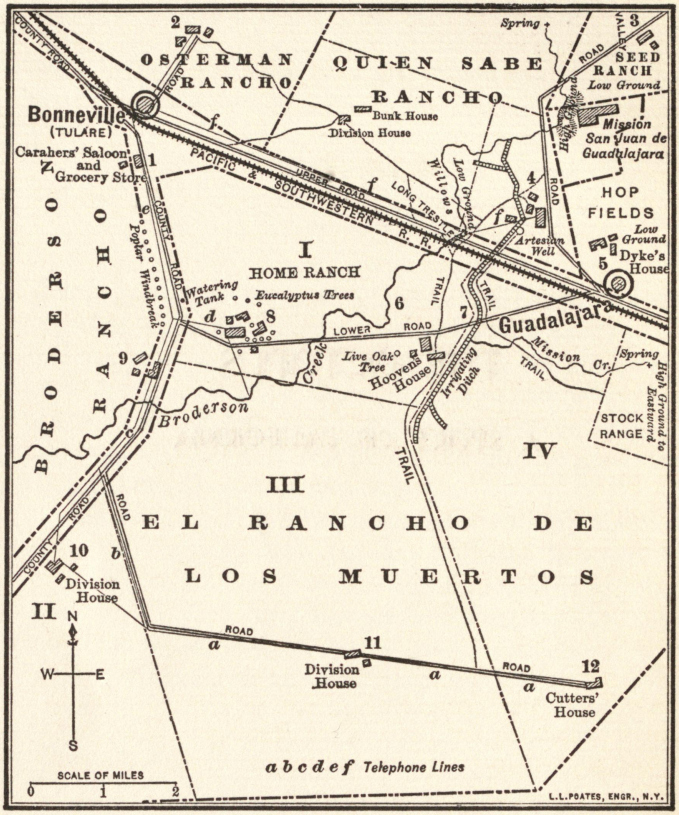
The first novel, "The Octopus," deals with the war between the wheat grower and the Railroad Trust; the second, "The Pit," will be the fictitious narrative of a "deal" in the Chicago wheat pit; while the third, "The Wolf," will probably have for its pivotal episode the relieving of a famine in an Old World community.

F. N.

ROSELLE, NEW JERSEY,
December 15, 1900.

THE OCTOPUS

A STORY OF CALIFORNIA



2. Osterman's Ranch House.
4. Annixter's Ranch House.
8. Derrick's Ranch House.
9. Broderson's Ranch House.

MAP OF THE COUNTRY DESCRIBED IN "THE OCTOPUS."

THE OCTOPUS

Book II

I

Just after passing Caraher's saloon, on the County Road that ran south from Bonneville, and that divided the Broderson ranch from that of Los Muertos, Presley was suddenly aware of the faint and prolonged blowing of a steam whistle that he knew must come from the railroad shops near the depot at Bonneville. In starting out from the ranch house that morning, he had forgotten his watch, and was now perplexed to know whether the whistle was blowing for twelve or for one o'clock. He hoped the former. Early that morning he had decided to make a long excursion through the neighbouring country, partly on foot and partly on his bicycle, and now noon was come already, and as yet he had hardly started. As he was leaving the house after breakfast, Mrs. Derrick had asked him to go for the mail at Bonneville, and he had not been able to refuse.

He took a firmer hold of the cork grips of his handlebars—the road being in a wretched condition after the recent hauling of the crop—and quickened his pace. He told himself that, no matter what the time was, he would not stop for luncheon at the ranch house, but would push on to Guadalajara and have a Spanish dinner at Solotari's, as he had originally planned.

There had not been much of a crop to haul that year. Half of the wheat on the Broderson ranch had failed entirely, and Derrick himself had hardly raised more than enough to supply seed for the winter's sowing. But such little hauling as there had been had reduced the roads thereabouts to a lamentable condition, and, during the dry season of the past few months, the layer of dust had deepened and thickened to such an extent that more than once Presley was obliged to dismount and trudge along on foot, pushing his bicycle in front of him.

It was the last half of September, the very end of the dry season, and all Tulare County, all the vast reaches of the San Joaquin Valley—in fact all South Central California, was bone dry, parched, and baked and crisped after four months of cloudless weather, when the day seemed always at noon, and the sun blazed white hot over the valley from the Coast Range in the west to the foothills of the Sierras in the east.

As Presley drew near to the point where what was known as the Lower Road struck off through the Rancho de Los Muertos, leading on to Guadalajara, he came upon one of the county watering-tanks, a great, iron-hooped tower of wood, straddling clumsily on its four uprights by the roadside. Since the day of its completion, the storekeepers and retailers of Bonneville had painted their advertisements upon it. It was a landmark. In that reach of level fields, the white letters upon it could be read for miles. A watering-trough stood near by, and, as he was very thirsty, Presley resolved to stop for a moment to get a drink.

He drew abreast of the tank and halted there, leaning his bicycle against the fence. A couple of men in white overalls were repainting the surface of the tank, seated on swinging platforms that hung by hooks from the roof. They were painting a sign—an advertisement. It was

all but finished and read, "S. Behrman, Real Estate, Mortgages, Main Street, Bonneville, Opposite the Post Office." On the horse-trough that stood in the shadow of the tank was another freshly painted inscription: "S. Behrman Has Something To Say To *You*."

As Presley straightened up after drinking from the faucet at one end of the horse-trough, the watering-cart itself laboured into view around the turn of the Lower Road. Two mules and two horses, white with dust, strained leisurely in the traces, moving at a snail's pace, their limp ears marking the time; while perched high upon the seat, under a yellow cotton wagon umbrella, Presley recognised Hooven, one of Derrick's tenants, a German, whom every one called "Bismarck," an excitable little man with a perpetual grievance and an endless flow of broken English.

"Hello, Bismarck," said Presley, as Hooven brought his team to a standstill by the tank, preparatory to refilling.

"Yoost der men I look for, Mist'r Praicely," cried the other, twisting the reins around the brake. "Yoost one minute, you wait, hey? I wanta talk mit you."

Presley was impatient to be on his way again. A little more time wasted, and the day would be lost. He had nothing to do with the management of the ranch, and if Hooven wanted any advice from him, it was so much breath wasted. These uncouth brutes of farm-hands and petty ranchers, grimed with the soil they worked upon, were odious to him beyond words. Never could he feel in sympathy with them, nor with their lives, their ways, their marriages, deaths, bickerings, and all the monotonous round of their sordid existence.

"Well, you must be quick about it, Bismarck," he answered sharply. "I'm late for dinner, as it is."

"Soh, now. Two minuten, und I be mit you." He

drew down the overhanging spout of the tank to the vent in the circumference of the cart and pulled the chain that let out the water. Then he climbed down from the seat, jumping from the tire of the wheel, and taking Presley by the arm led him a few steps down the road.

"Say," he began. "Say, I want to hef some converzations mit you. Yoost der men I want to see. Say, Caraher, he tole me dis morgen—say, he tole me Mist'r Derrick gowun to farm der whole demn rench hisseluf der next yahr. No more tenants. Say, Caraher, he tole me all der tenants get der sach; Mist'r Derrick gowun to work der whole demn rench hisseluf, hey? *Me*, I get der sach alzoh, hey? You hef hear about dose ting? Say, me, I hef on der ranch been sieben yahr—seven yahr. Do I alzoh——"

"You'll have to see Derrick himself or Harran about that, Bismarck," interrupted Presley, trying to draw away. "That's something outside of me entirely."

But Hooven was not to be put off. No doubt he had been meditating his speech all the morning, formulating his words, preparing his phrases.

"Say, no, no," he continued. "Me, I wanta stay bei der place; seven yahr I hef stay. Mist'r Derrick, he doand want dot I should be ge-sacked. Who, den, will der ditch ge-tend? Say, you tell 'um Bismarck hef gotta sure stay bei der place. Say, you hef der pull mit der Governor. You speak der gut word for me."

"Harran is the man that has the pull with his father, Bismarck," answered Presley. "You get Harran to speak for you, and you're all right."

"Sieben yahr I hef stay," protested Hooven, "and who will der ditch ge-tend, und alle dem cettles drive?"

"Well, Harran's your man," answered Presley, preparing to mount his bicycle.

"Say, you hef hear about dose ting?"

"I don't hear about anything, Bismarck. I don't know the first thing about how the ranch is run."

"*Und der pipe-line ge-mend*," Hooven burst out, suddenly remembering a forgotten argument. He waved an arm. "Ach, der pipe-line bei der Mission Greek, und der waäter-hole for dose cettles. Say, he doand doo ut *himselluf*, berhaps, I doand tink."

"Well, talk to Harran about it."

"Say, he doand farm der whole demn rench bei hisseluf. Me, I gotta stay."

But on a sudden the water in the cart gushed over the sides from the vent in the top with a smart sound of splashing. Hooven was forced to turn his attention to it. Presley got his wheel under way.

"I hef some converzations mit Herran," Hooven called after him. "He doand doo ut bei hisseluf, den, Mist'r Derrick; ach, no. I stay bei der rench to drive dose cettles."

He climbed back to his seat under the wagon umbrella, and, as he started his team again with great cracks of his long whip, turned to the painters still at work upon the sign and declared with some defiance:

"Sieben yahr; yais, sir, seiben yahr I hef been on dis rench. Git oop, you mule you, hoop!"

Meanwhile Presley had turned into the Lower Road. He was now on Derrick's land, division No. 1, or, as it was called, the Home ranch, of the great Los Muertos Rancho. The road was better here, the dust laid after the passage of Hooven's watering-cart, and, in a few minutes, he had come to the ranch house itself, with its white picket fence, its few flower beds, and grove of eucalyptus trees. On the lawn at the side of the house, he saw Harran in the act of setting out the automatic sprinkler. In the shade of the house, by the porch, were two or three of the greyhounds, part of the pack that